

through a Working Capital Fund. Just like the private sector, the Arsenal is out there competing for work—and winning it. They have signed agreements with Sivyer Steel, Mack Defense and others.

But Rock Island is about more than just production—it is also the bedrock of the Quad-City region as the area's largest employer. One example of family commitment to the Arsenal is Jeff Roberts, a machinist at Rock Island. His great-great-great-great grandfather was a master carpenter at Rock Island in the 1860s and helped build the island's iconic Clock Tower. Working at the Arsenal for our men and women in uniform gave Jeff a clear understanding of, as he described it, "what you're doing and why you're doing it." He added, "I've never had the job satisfaction I have now until I came here."

Jeff's experience is replicated all across the Arsenal. The island has more than 70 military and private sector organizations as tenants. Over the years, the Arsenal has welcomed the Army Corps of Engineers, Army Sustainment Command, Joint Munitions Command, and Army Contracting Command, among others. Most recently, Rock Island welcomed the headquarters for First Army, which is in charge of mobilizing, training and deploying our Army Reservists. It may not always have the glitz of a front-page story. But their collective dedication shows how central Rock Island is to the support of our military, every day.

Rock Island Arsenal is a large and vibrant installation, with a rich history and an impressive array of ongoing activities. Rock Island Arsenal has made remarkable contributions over the past 150 years. It has served us through our difficult times and will continue to do so in the future.

I thank those who serve at the Arsenal today and those who have served in the past. And also to those who have joined me in honoring Rock Island Arsenal in its 150-year anniversary celebration.

INDEPENDENCE DAY 2012

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate our Nation's Independence Day.

Over 230 years ago, a collection of very brave and thoughtful men put their names and lives on the line to support a visionary idea, writing:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Today we honor those patriots who crafted our country's identity, and we appreciate every man, woman, and child who has shared it, refined it, and lived it. There is a reason why the rest of the world looks to America as a bold

leader, and it began in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. It continues nationwide today in our independent spirit, our ambition, and our sense of generosity, and we certainly see that in my home State of Alaska.

We see it in communities large and small, as we solve problems and work together to make life better and the future brighter. Today, we take a moment to realize that we do all this without thinking about it—and that few other countries in the world can boast the same.

But as we take a moment to appreciate all that we have, we must never forget the cost of freedom. Thousands have given their lives to secure the blessings of liberty. Men and women in uniform are serving bravely overseas, enduring tremendous sacrifice, while countless others guard our shores, protect our interests abroad, and defend our skies here at home. Their burden is shared by the families who endure empty spots at the dinner table, missed birthdays, and absence from special moments like a child's first steps. Freedom is indeed perishable and we are grateful for those who safeguard our liberty for our children and grandchildren.

As Americans, we honor our veterans and the freedoms they defend. We speak our minds and we think big thoughts—bounded only by the limits of our imagination.

On this Independence Day, I am honored to represent Alaska in the United States Senate.

Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, I rise today in the tradition of patriotic celebration to recognize 236 years of American independence. The Fourth of July is not only a proud and inspiring symbol of our nation's independence, but of our undeniable strength and unity. As we celebrate Independence Day this year, I am thankful for our forefathers' struggle to afford us freedom and liberty which we enjoy today.

As the first battles of the Revolutionary War broke out in April 1775, many colonists were skeptical of complete independence from Great Britain. By the middle of the following year, tensions and hostility were high. As revolutionary sentiment spread, so too did the colonists' desire to become liberated from Great Britain.

On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress voted in favor of a resolution for independence. Two days later, our Founding Fathers adopted the Declaration of Independence, marking the United States' break with Great Britain. In 1870, the U.S. Congress instituted July 4th as a federal holiday. As Americans, we are proud to celebrate this important national holiday, a symbol of our patriotism and freedom.

On the eve of this celebration, we also pay tribute to today's heroes; America's brave men and women in uniform who have fought tirelessly to protect and preserve the very freedom afforded to us by our Founding Fathers. Their perseverance in the face of

adversity is a testament to the strength of the greatest military in the world. We are proud to honor our veterans, active duty soldiers, and military families for their grave sacrifices made for the safety and security of this great nation.

Next week, as we gather with family and friends, let us reflect on the trials and tribulations of our nation's path to independence and the everlasting impact of this defining moment in America's history. With appreciation for the freedoms we enjoy today, I ask my colleagues to join me in commemorating the birth of our Nation's independence.

CONGRATULATING THE 2012 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I want to commend three outstanding Vermont companies that were recently singled out for recognition at the 2012 Fancy Food Show in Washington, D.C. These vendors were among the select 110 Silver Finalists for the show's coveted Specialty Outstanding Food Innovation, soft, gold awards, widely considered to be one of the top honors in the specialty food industry. The soft Awards, from the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade (NASFT), recognize the best in specialty food and beverage and are a coveted industry honor. This year's contest was the most competitive in the history of the awards, with a record 2,520 entries.

Two of the vendors, Vermont Butter and Cheese Creamery, located in Websterville, and Big Picture Farm L3C, located in Townshend, won the gold soft in their categories, while Grafton Village Cheese, located in Grafton, represented Vermont proudly as a finalist in the category for outstanding cheese or dairy products for their new cheese, Cave Aged Leyden.

Vermont Butter and Cheese Creamery's owners, Allison Hooper and Bob Reese, deserve well-earned congratulations for winning three gold soft Awards, including Best Product Line, Best Cheese or Dairy Product for their aged goat cheese Bonne Bouche, and Best Perishable Food Service Product for their Sea Salt Crystal Cultured Butter. Allison and Bob's extraordinary achievement demonstrates, beyond a doubt, that Vermont Butter and Cheese Creamery has succeeded at building a high quality, superior brand that reflects the values and ethos of Vermont.

Congratulations are due as well to Big Picture Farm's owners, Louisa Conrad and Lucas Farrell, for winning a gold soft Award in the Confectionary Category for their Farmstead Goat Milk Caramels. When I met this young couple last week, I was taken with their energy and excitement for both their goats and their award winning caramels. Earlier this year, Louisa and Lucas received a U.S. Department of Agriculture Value Added Producer Grant which helped them expand their farm, hire additional staff members,